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December 6, 1993

Mr. Howell Raines
Editorial Page Editor
New York Times

Dear Mr. Raines,

Michael Gordon's December 1 article referred briefly to the arrest of Russian scientists who maintain that Russia developed a new class of deadly nerve gasses.

I would like to call to your attention the central importance of the case of one of these scientists, Dr. Vil Mirzayanov, a chemist and a whistleblower who was arrested in October of 1992 for allegedly revealing state secrets. At that time, no Russian law existed which had any legal bearing on his case. There was no basis for his prosecution: a secret decree was passed by the Council of Ministers on March 30, 1993, which classified all previous work on chemical and biological weapons a state secret. This decree is being used to prosecute the case retroactively, and the case was assigned to the Russian Supreme Court on Nov. 25th.

Since it is doubtful that Mirzayanov revealed any state secrets by merely mentioning this program and, furthermore, that unpublished legal norms have no legal standing, it is highly advisable that the case be promptly dismissed by either the General Procurator's office or by the judge assigned to the case by the Supreme Court.

Otherwise, we must conclude that Mirzayanov was telling the truth and a whole new class of deadly binary chemical weapons was created and that the Russian government is reverting to the old Soviet-style practice of persecuting dissident scientists.

Best regards,

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
President, New York Academy of Sciences;
University Professor, the Rockefeller University